

Long-held values cherished in Curran

Residents love their quiet lives

By Tom Vanden Brook

Press-Gazette

CURRAN — An advertisement extolling the virtues of rural life could find no better candidate than Curran.

This tiny Kewaunee County community wears the timeless look of rural America: a general store selling everything from wax beans to washing machines, a cozy tavern with wood-paneled walls covered with racks of antlers, a baseball diamond carved out of a farmfield.

The town's sole industry produces flowers. With 13 acres of greenhouse, Greiling Farms is one of the upper Midwest's largest wholesalers of spring bedding, foliage and seasonal blooming plants such as poinsettias.

Quiet, clean, friendly.

"That's the wish of the people," said former town clerk Bill O'Brien, sitting at a kitchen table with his mother Eva, herself a resident of Curran for 55 years.

"It's a nice, friendly, quiet rural area," he said. "And it's meant to stay that way."

To ensure Curran retains its country charm, a town zoning regulation requires new developments planned on prime agriculture land be built on at least 75 acres, said town Chairman Richard Wochos. That requirement maintains high-quality agricultural areas primarily for farming.

It appears to work. Immaculate farms — and little else — dot the rolling landscape surrounding Curran. Officials estimate the population at about 25.

Greiling Farms holds up its end of the bargain, too. Despite a national reputation for its products, the wholesaler keeps a low profile.

"We try to be very low-key," said Tom Wall, a Greiling spokesman. "We're wholesale, not retail, so we don't blow our horn a lot."

That attitude — hard work and soft talk — pervades Curran.

Wall said Greiling couldn't ask for a better place for its operation. Distribution of plants during the spring and holidays requires the wholesaler to call on about 100 seasonal workers in addition to its regular staff. And those temporary employees, mostly high school students from surrounding communities, are top-notch.

"There's just an excellent labor force out here," Wall said. "The work ethic of the students and their parents is tremendous."



Press-Gazette photos by Ken Behrend

Flower power: Connie Kramer, left, of Stangelville and Sue Burden of Maribel arrange cyclamen plants at Greiling Farms, the largest employer in Curran.

Greiling's 13 acres of greenhouses are used to grow plant seeds and cuttings for wholesale distribution throughout Wisconsin and neighboring states.

People
&
Places

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Curran

This weekly feature looks at small area communities and the people who make them tick.

"I can't stress enough the quality of the people," he added. "That's, I think, the area's strongest attribute."

Judging from the O'Briens, the people of Curran share a mutual admiration for Greiling Farms.

"They've done a lot for our community," Eva O'Brien said. "They're excellent neighbors, and they're very concerned about the quality of the community."

Please see **Curran/B-2**

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— Former town Clerk Bill O'Brien

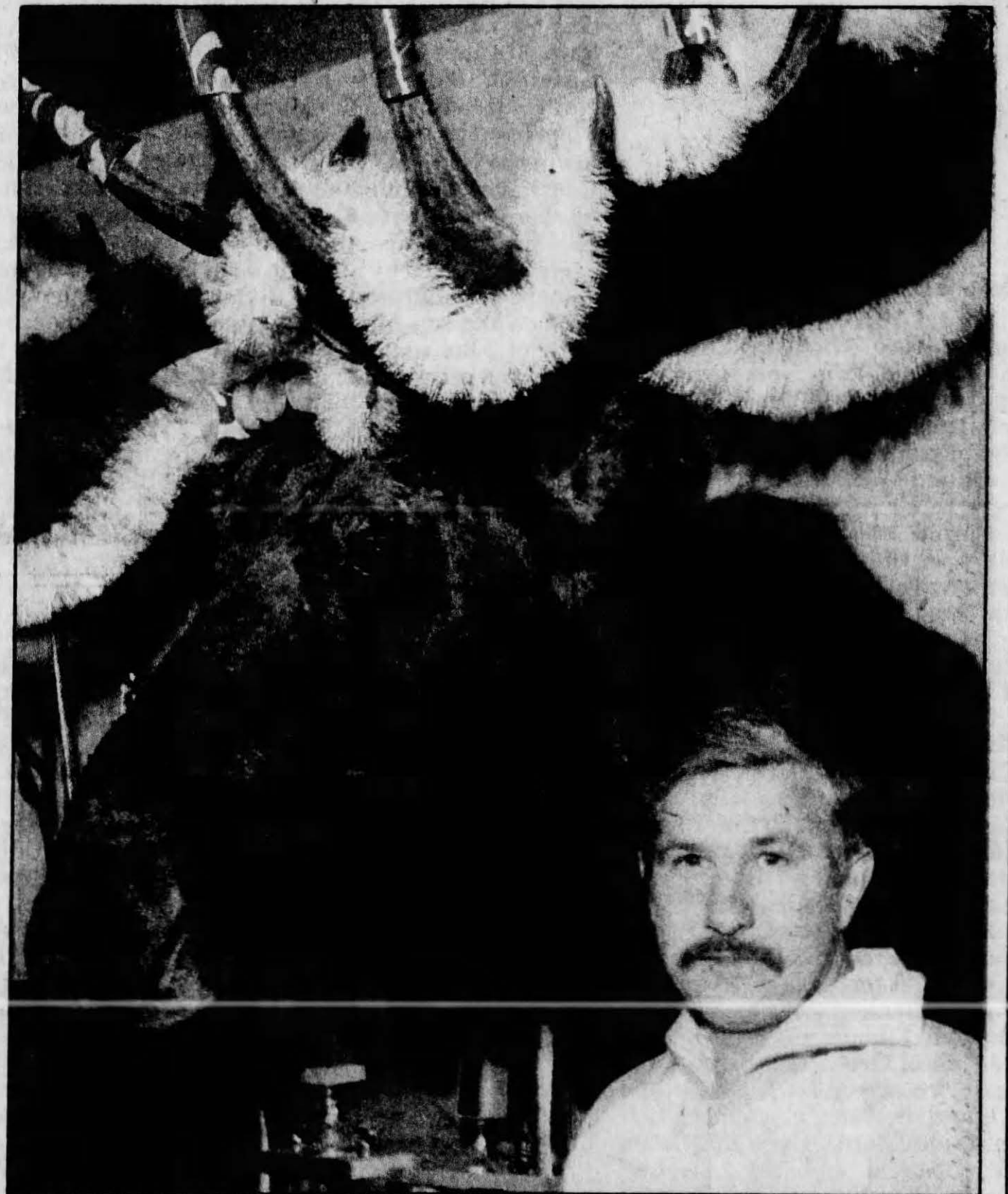
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Nice view: Eva O'Brien, left, looks out from the porch of her home in Curran with her son, Bill, a semi-

nary student in Hales Corners and a daughter, Colleen, a nurse at Bellin Memorial Hospital.



Party moose: Gerald Winnekens shows a moose head mounted on the wall of his Whitetail Lodge

tavern in Curran. The moose was donated by his twin brother. The lodge is Curran's only tavern.

Curran

Bill O'Brien, who has researched the area's history, said Curran's heritage helps explain the diligence of its citizens. Settled in the mid-1800s by immigrants from Ireland, Curran took its name from John P. Curran, described in the June 13, 1890, edition of the *Kewaunee Enterprise* as a "celebrated Irish orator."

The Irish, along with immigrants from a number of other European countries, developed lasting ties to the land and were no strangers to heavy toil. That legacy lives on today.

Said Bill O'Brien: "This is still an area with hard-working people."

But as hard as they work, they still squeeze in time for play, said Gerald Winnekens, owner of the Whitetail Lodge tavern.

According to Winnekens, outdoor activities abound in the area, including fishing on two nearby lakes, deer hunting and snowmobiling.

But one event has dominated the community's social calendar for several years: the Curran Invitational Softball Tournament.

Generally held the second weekend in July, the event draws eight teams for three days of food, drink and fun.

Eva O'Brien, it could be argued, owns the best seat in town for the tournament. Her porch faces the field across County Highway KB.

Even as fresh snow covered the diamond, Eva O'Brien looked forward to the 1990 tournament. But she made it clear that Curran's commitment to quiet is not compromised at the invitational. Anybody who overindulges, she said, is politely asked to leave.

"Everybody has a good time, but if anybody gets too loud. . . .," she said without finishing her sentence. She didn't have to.

In Curran, the time-honored value of quiet, friendly deportment still holds sway.

■ **Next Week:** Ellison Bay in Door County